

# State reaches agreement with power company to pursue environmental improvements

MADISON -- Wisconsin Electric Power Company is the first business in Wisconsin to sign a cooperative environmental agreement with the state under which the utility commits to pursuing environmental improvements beyond those required by current regulations.

A Department of Natural Resources environmental official hopes Wisconsin Electric's initiative will encourage more Wisconsin companies to participate in similar agreements with the state.

"These agreements enable both companies and the DNR to legally pursue environmental regulatory innovations that we can't accomplish under our current system," says Mark McDermid, director of the DNR's Bureau of Cooperative Environmental Assistance. "Our goal is to find new ways to improve the quality of Wisconsin's environment while keeping businesses and government efficient."

Legislation passed in the 1997-99 state budget permits the DNR to sign cooperative environmental agreements with up to 10 companies that pledge to pursue a higher level of environmental performance than current regulatory programs require.

The five-year cooperative environmental agreement signed Feb. 5 by officials at Wisconsin Electric and the DNR applies to Wisconsin Electric's Pleasant Prairie Power Plant in Kenosha County. The 1,160-megawatt Pleasant Prairie plant is Wisconsin's largest coal-fired electric generating facility.

Under the agreement, the company will beneficially reuse coal ash from its landfills as a fuel source, thus reducing its use of coal, freeing landfill space and protecting groundwater. It will also develop and carry out a facility-wide environmental management system at its Pleasant Prairie electric generating plant to identify and minimize or eliminate all environmental impacts.

Wisconsin Electric also will conduct mercury emissions testing and research, expand its efforts to inform and involve the public in decisions affecting the environment and publicly report on its environmental performance.

In return, the DNR will speed up and streamline permitting procedures while still protecting the environment; eliminate unnecessary monitoring requirements; and increase electronic information sharing to reduce paper and speed decision making.

"Wisconsin Electric has a long history of consistent environmental compliance that has put the company in an excellent position to pursue a higher level of environmental performance," McDermid says. "Under our cooperative agreement the public will continue to get affordable, reliable electricity that respects natural resources, safeguards public health and responds to people's desire for open company and government operations."

Companies interested in learning more about this program should contact the DNR's Bureau of Cooperative Environmental Assistance, (608) 267-9700, 101 S. Webster Street, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark McDermid, (608) 267-3125 or John Shenot, (608) 267-0802.